Transforming Peasant Politics into Ecological Politics

The CSUTCB in Bolivia, 1979-1990

by
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The emergence in Bolivia in 1979 of the major peasant union confederation, the Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia *(CSUTCB) was integral to the development of an Indigenous politics of the environment in late twentieth-century Bolivia. While the existing literature widely documents the CSUTCB's focus on class and ethnicity, this paper addresses the organization's ecological politics. The paper argues that the natural world became the nexus of interactions between the local and the global in Bolivian peasant politics in the late twentieth century. The CSUTCB's environmental discourse reflected a critique of modernity and the nation-state and exemplifies a turn towards the "indigenization" of debates over resource nationalism.*

Keywords: *Bolivia, Indigenous politics, peasant unions, indigeneity,* katarismo

This article outlines the ways in which the emergence in Bolivia of the peasant union confederation, the *Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia* (Unified Syndical Confederation of Peasant Workers of Bolivia, CSUTCB) was integral to the development of an Indigenous politics of the environment in late twentieth century Bolivia. In 1979 the CSUTCB arose as the syndical wing of the *katarista* movement and acted as a vital node between *katarismo* and the wider labour movement in Bolivia. Katarismo refers to several political groups and organizations which over the period 1960–1995, paid homage to the eighteenth-century Andean rebel leader Tupaj Katari either explicitly in their organizational names or in their political practice. *Katarismo* was the first movement in Bolivia to blend a critique of racialized oppression with class-based theories of exploitation. It was rooted powerfully in Aymara traditions of collective organization in the Bolivian *altiplano* but came to fruition in the urban center of La Paz through a cadre of Indigenous intellectuals. While existing literature documents the CSUTCB's focus on ethnicity in particular (Rivera, 1987; Ticona, 1996), I address its ecological politics which are a lacuna in the scholarship. I argue that the natural world became the nexus of interactions between the local and the global in Bolivian peasant politics.

In making these arguments, I bring together decolonial scholarship with theoretical perspectives on peasant unions to show how they along with Indigenous movements in the Global South can interact as dynamic organizational forms characterized by hybridity. I argue that the CSUTCB is marked by

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a dialectic of peasant union and Indigenous movement structures. This was crucial in producing a distinct ecological politics within the CSUTCB from the 1970s which departed from resource nationalism (Young, 2017). The focus on ecology arose not from the CSUTCB's emphasis on indigeneity, but the way in which it found tangible expression was determined by the confederation's imbrication with organized labor. Analyzing CSUTCB activity and discourse through the lens of ecology therefore brings new insights into the peasant movement's wider contestations of state, class, and colonialism. I begin by providing an overview of the literature surrounding this topic. I then set out the methodological approach adopted in the paper before presenting my main findings.

LITERATURE

In this section, I outline the two strands of literature on (de)coloniality and theoretical approaches to peasant unionism which together underpin this article's conceptual approach. As I demonstrate, incorporating ideas derived from decolonial scholarship within theoretical approaches to the trade union model can enrich the understanding of Indigenous peasant movements in the Global South. I begin by outlining key contributions to the literature on peasant unionism which, I argue, fail to satisfactorily account for why an ecological politics became so important in the CSUTCB's program. To address this question, I turn additionally to decolonial scholarship which provides a useful framework for approaches to Indigenous social movements and Indigenous cosmovisions. Decolonial literature has brought new attention to the epistemic implications of Indigenous struggles, particularly in the ecological realm. Indigenous and peasant mobilizations for land and territory, it is argued, often contain the potential to disrupt the nature-culture divide embedded within Western modern paradigms. I connect these two literatures in my analysis of the CSUTCB's ecological politics specifically, where the overlapping Indigenous and labor movement forms are powerfully manifest.

Recent scholarship has pointed out the convergence between twenty-first-century trade unionism and environmental struggles in Latin America (Anigstein and Wyczykie, 2019). I show that this body of work could be enriched by historical analysis of the CSUTCB's focus on the environment in the 1980s. This article therefore seeks to contribute findings on the important relationship between peasant unionism and environmentalism in late twentieth century Bolivia. I argue that the CSUTCB's emergence as a key political player in Bolivian politics marked a rupture with what historian Kevin Young (2017) has termed resource nationalism - the ideology that natural resources should be extracted for the benefit of Bolivian people rather than foreign elites – as the dominant and unifying framework by which demands around natural resources were articulated in twentieth century Bolivia. Resource nationalism acquired special vigor from the 1950s as the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario party (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, MNR) and a broad populist coalition rallied around a developmentalist agenda centered on the nationalization of mining interests, agrarian reform, and state-led economic

development (Young, 2017). This united the urban working classes, miners, and the middle classes, and reached a zenith in the MNR-steered 1952 Bolivian national revolution. However, the economic vision presented by resource nationalism failed to account for how Indigenous campesinos experienced the environment as a site of cultural and historical importance. This paper argues that the positions adopted by the CSUTCB in 1979–1990 represent a crucial juncture in the formation of an ecologically oriented left that saw Indigenous and environmental politics converge within the labor movement. In making this argument, the paper draws on decolonial and post-development scholarship as a theoretical underpinning. Decolonial thinkers such as Aníbal Quijano have pointed out that the question of Indigenous movements is tied up with the historical structuring of Latin American states along a racial axis of colonial origin (2005; 2000). As Latin America's post-independence states came into being in the early nineteenth century, their architects were confronted with the problem of Indigenous peoples who had been designated "inferior races" under colonial rule. Indigenous peoples could not be incorporated into the new states *as Indigenous peoples* because this category was antithetical to citizenship of new political systems still tied to this colonial matrix of power (Quijano, 2005). At the same time, post-development theorists have emphasized how the political struggles of peasant and Indigenous groups relate not only to the rights of natural resources and territories but to ways of being and knowing (Escobar, 2018), echoing the Foucauldian theory of "subjugated knowledges." This literature points out that while colonial regimes in Latin America pursued the exploitative appropriation of nature, they also marginalized Indigenous knowledge systems in an intertwined process. The ecological conflicts waged by Indigenous-campesino movements, in this case, the CSUTCB, therefore acquire an important epistemological dimension because they challenged the erasure of Indigenous knowledge systems from state discourses on the environment (Escobar, 2008; Leff, 2001; 2012;).

Some of these debates focus on whether the CSUTCB should be considered a (peasant) union in the Western tradition, or something more akin to an Indigenous "new social movement" organization. In the 1980s the rise of postmodernism in the academy shifted the debate away from economy and class to culture. Subsequent "new social movement" theories associated with postmodernism emphasized "resistance" to the state, rather than attempts at the capture of state power as the decisive element of peasant mobilization (Brass, 2005). Meanwhile, in his examination of the CSUTCB which employs the theoretical framework of French structural Marxist Nicos Poulantzas, Dwight Hahn argues that the CSUTB's adoption of ethnicity as the foundation of its analysis caused significant political problems. Hahn argues that despite a commitment to ethnocultural revindication derived from Indigenous values, the CSUTCB's structure was premised on "Western principles" (1996). He thus identifies a contradiction in the CSUTCB's appeal to indigeneity, and the Western model of organizing (i.e. the Trade Union) it adopted to advance this. Strobele-Gregor has made similar observations, positing a conflict between tradition and modernity in its approaches to political organization (1996). As a Western political organization, the CSUTCB "was unable to incorporate the non-Western local political leadership based in the social relations of the Indigenous com-

munities" (Hahn, 1996: 100). This was reflected in the aims of the union, which tended to focus on obtaining concessions from the capitalist state such as improved access to bank loans and farming equipment. The CSUTCB can be thought of, according to Hahn, as representing an Indigenous-led intermediary between the non-capitalist Indigenous population of the Bolivian Andes, and the capitalist state. Ultimately the politics of the CSUTCB, argues Hahn, were tied to the Bolivian capitalist state, meaning it could not adequately represent its "non-capitalist" peasant members.

Hahn argues that by negotiating access to credit, infrastructure, and the like, the CSUTCB was effectively advocating for the inclusion of "non-capitalist" peasants into the capitalist system. However, he fails to discuss where these differences between capitalist and non-capitalist peasants lie. Such a Manichean distinction I contend is artificial when in post-1953 Bolivia all peasants found themselves operating, more or less, within a system of agrarian capitalism. By the 1980s peasants were well integrated into the domestic market economy. This does not mean that capitalism as a system of commodified relations or exchange values was thus completely embraced by the peasantry. As recent scholarship has affirmed, peasant inclusion in domestic or foreign markets does not necessarily undermine traditional Andean peasant practices based on reciprocity and cooperation (for further discussion see Kerssen, 2015; Walsh-Dilley, 2013).

Secondly, typically a union is a vehicle for the extraction of concessions-style governments does not necessarily mean that the CSUTCB itself was premised on these same "Western principles." Conceptualizing the CSUTCB as a "Western organization" is both analytically unhelpful given the term's lack of clarity, and fails to account for how the CSUTCB at the local level was embedded in traditional modes of highland Indigenous organizing. As erstwhile katarista (later Vice-President on a neoliberal ticket) Victor Hugo Cardenas points out, the trade union "face" of the CSUTCB appears principally in its relations with the state (1989: 225). The CSUTCB itself was clear on its dual form; its 1983 *Political Thesis* stated, for example, "we have embraced the trade union organization without forgetting our *mallkus, kurakas* and our own forms of organization" (CSUTCB, 1983). Rather than a "new social movement," in this period (1978-1990) the CSUTCB can be better understood as a hybrid organization that incorporated elements of highland Indigenous organization, as well as unionism implemented in the MNR-era. It was this hybridity that allowed a discourse on the environment to flourish, as it encompassed critiques based on both resource sovereignty and the revindication of Indigenous cosmovisions.

It is necessary to flesh out the relationship between the CSUTCB and the state in order to understand the context in which it developed its discourse on the environment and ethnicity. Although the early Marxist scholarship is frequently criticized for characterizing peasant movements as "pre-political" and lacking in a wider political program beyond seizing control of land in their locality (Hobsbawm, 1959), there is a rich literature on peasant movements, state formation, and capitalism from Marxist perspectives which resist atavistic conceptualizations of the peasantry as an impediment within class-centered visions of social change (Harris, 1978; Vanden, 1982).

This literature points out that agrarian movements that orient their goals around political or economic autonomy ultimately run up against the power of the state which retains the power to determine the kind of economic relations peasants enter into. State capture, it is argued, is the singular means by which peasant movements may meaningfully realize the full scope of their aims (Brass, 2005). Certainly, the CSUTCB was pragmatic and at times vague in its approach to the state, recognizing that as the central instrument of political power, a level of engagement was both desirable and unavoidable. The union's proposals stated, for example, "We do not want a statist society, but we are not interested in economic liberalism either. We look for an adequate balance that allows us community and collectivist self-management" (1989b: 29).

A class versus ethnicity (and by extension, culture) debate has structured much scholarship on recent agrarian movements in Latin America. In his study on the Zapatista peasant guerrilla movement in Chiapas in the 1990s, Tom Brass maintains that the movement's singular focus on ethnicity obscured intra-ethnic class divisions. Since *mestizos* (those with mixed European-Indigenous heritage) can also be peasants and landless laborers, "the struggle for Indigenous empowerment is in effect a war between ethnically distinct components of the same class and involves one set of workers and peasants pitted against another set" (2005).

Yet while ethnic revindication was central in CSUTCB discourse there is no evidence that this came at any neglect of analysis based on class, or that disagreements in the CSUTCB were refracted on class lines. The CSUTCB adopted the nomenclature of "union," understood in the Western tradition as a collective structure based on common interests among workers. Unions in Europe and the Americas have historically directed their efforts toward the protection of the social and economic rights of workers within the framework of productive capitalist relations (Anigstein and Wyczykier, 2019). Adopting a campesino union structure provided many institutional benefits for the CSUTCB but it was strongly influenced by traditional forms of highland Indigenous social organization derived from the *ayllu*, the pre-Hispanic territorial social unit of the highlands. Ayllus are political bodies that differ from the nature-culture divide of the Western political tradition (Escobar, 2010) as they encompass not just families, but spirits and other-than-human beings who reside within the same territorial space and share relations of reciprocity (see Yampara: 1992: 143). The formation of peasant unions across Bolivia was a highly differentiated process. In effect, the CSUTCB was tasked with uniting regions with very different historical trajectories of peasant organization in the post-revolutionary era. However, its own origins in the Aymara-speaking highlands where traditional Indigenous social organization retained considerable influence is reflected in the CSUTCB's structure and strategy.

To summarize, in this section, I have outlined how connecting key concepts within the literature on peasant unionism and decoloniality enables a more complicated vision of the CSUTCB as a hybrid political entity, operating as an Indigenous movement and labor union. As I will explain in more detail, this dynamic is exemplified in the distinctly ecological politics developed by the CSUTCB in the 1980s.

METHODS

The findings from this paper derive from a project exploring the connections between radical Indigenous politics and the environment in twentieth-century Bolivia. This paper is concerned with how ecological consciousness found tangible political expression within the CSUTCB, as a syndical-Indigenous movement in Bolivia in the later twentieth century. It examines how these discourses on ecology are linked to the political programs of the CSUTCB, and how a focus on this discourse can contribute to the analysis of Indigenous environmental politics. In Bolivia, agriculture employed approximately 46 percent of the country's labor force in 1987 (Hudson and Henratty, 1989). The landscapes and topography in which peasants worked varied considerably, with the bulk of agricultural production taking place in the fertile central valleys around Cochabamba. The Bolivian altiplano meanwhile reaches heights of 4,000 meters and is prone to frosts and droughts, which makes agricultural yields often very low. Natural disasters also made agriculture extremely challenging throughout the twentieth century while soil erosion was a persistent problem in the valleys and highlands (Zimmerer, 1993).

I employ historical methods and use a combination of audio and printed materials as the basis of my findings. I assess audio recordings of CSUTCB national and regional congresses between 1984 and 1989 housed in the Museo Nacional de Etnografía y Folklore (Museum of Folklore and Ethnography, MUSEF) in La Paz, Bolivia. The congresses were a forum in which internal proposals were debated, grievances aired, and strategies adopted. They were central to the functioning of the union and the dissemination of its political programs. The recordings of these meetings are invaluable in answering the questions posed in this article because they offer extensive insight into the CSUTCB's political and organizational priorities within the 1980s as well as a record of internal frustrations and viewpoints which do not always appear in the official publications of the CSUTCB. They thus are a useful addition to the printed materials disseminated by the CSUTCB, which I also examine.

In using these recordings, I draw on decolonial methodologies derived from oral history, in other words, a collective approach that aims to center the voices of historical protagonists themselves and embrace the subjectivities which emerge through oral testimonies (Rivera, 1987). I listened to sixteen separate recordings of CSUTCB congresses dated between 1984 and 1989 which totaled around two hundred hours of audio time, and many of the meetings spanned several days (there were no available recordings of meetings prior to 1984). I compiled transcripts for eight of these recordings. The passages I quote are drawn from these selected transcripts. The purpose of the transcripts is not to enable a detailed linguistic analysis but to capture key points arising from these meetings, especially those that touch on questions of ecology, environment, or ethnicity. The transcripts themselves can therefore be considered subjective and interpretive. The majority of the recorded meetings are conducted in Spanish, but the Quechua and Aymara languages occasionally feature, especially in the departmental meetings. I draw my findings from speeches made in the Spanish language only. In many of the recordings, it is difficult to discern what is said due to poor audio quality, background noise, and music or vocalizations such

as whistles and shouts. In others, attendees begin to speak without introducing themselves or with their introductions cut off.

In addition to these recordings, I also make extensive use of pamphlets, published interviews, and documents from the wider peasant movement throughout the 1970s and 1980s derived from archival research in the Archivo y Biblioteca Nacionales de Bolivia (National Archives and Library, ABNB) in Sucre as well as from public collections located in Senate House Library, London, and the Bodleian Library, Oxford in the UK. These include documents published by the CSUTCB, as well as non-governmental organizations such as the Centro de Información y Documentación de Bolivia (Bolivian Centre for Information and Documentation, CIDOB).[1] For material relating to agrarian reform, I made use of papers in the Walter Guevara Arze archive at the ABNB as well as newspapers from the period.

FROM DICTATORSHIP TO DEMOCRACY: THE EVOLUTION OF THE CSUTCB

The CSUTCB emerged out of a longer history of peasant mobilization in Bolivia which included union and non-union forms of organization. Peasant unions began to emerge in the 1930s, with the first agricultural *sindicato* (union) officially founded in 1936 in Ucureña, Cochabamba by peasant veterans of the Chaco War with the assistance of Eduardo Arze Loureiro, then Minister of Peasant Affairs and member of the *Partido Obrera Socialista* (Socialist Workers' Party) (Iriarte, 1974; Kohl, 1984). These unions were political and social organizations formed by communities to regulate internal obligations and external relations with regional authorities. The reformist elites associated with the MNR that spearheaded the movement that overthrew the mining oligarchy in the Revolution of 1952 encouraged the development of peasant unions. Their aim was to incorporate the Indian into a modern political apparatus that could form part of a cross-sector coalition against oligarchical authorities (Ticona, Rojas, and Albó, 1995: 101). In the late 1930s and the early 1940s waves of rural confrontations by peasants against landowners and state officials, particularly in the Cochabamba valleys, provided compelling evidence for reformist elites of the need to encourage unions to challenge the power of oligarch landowners, while mindful of the potential radicalism of these unions and that their challenge to social relations needed to be contained from above (Gotkowitz, 2007).

Unions acquired considerable significance in the years following the 1953 agrarian reform. The Agrarian Reform Commission recommended that the government of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario party under Víctor Paz Estenssoro eliminate the *haciendas* (landed estates owned by descendants of Europeans) to address the extreme inequalities of land ownership in Bolivia. The activity of grassroots unions, especially in the Cochabamba valleys, gave significant impetus to this land reform. Prior to 1952, four percent of landowners possessed 82 percent of the land (Eckstein, 1982: 108). The Indian population of the highlands was expected to fulfill labor obligations for large landowners in exchange for the right to cultivate a small parcel of land.

Prohibitions on the produce that peasants could sell meant that peasant families could not earn any significant cash income (Clark, 1968).

The agrarian reform was signed in Ucureña - symbolically chosen because it was the site of the first peasant union - in August 1953 and was the first major project of land distribution in Bolivian history, drawing inspiration from the agrarian reform passed in Mexico thirty-five years earlier. Through the dissolution of haciendas in the highlands and valleys, it distributed six million hectares of land which benefited 250,000 families and more than a million farmers (Iriarte, 1974: 46). It aimed to end the feudal relations endemic in the countryside by eliminating the system of bondage associated with the haciendas (Fontana, 2014). However, although agrarian reform contained plans to transform all rural areas into "productive" spaces through state investment, in reality, the state funneled the majority of its available funds into new large capitalist agribusinesses in lowland colonization zones that were largely unaffected by the Agrarian Reform (Iriarte, 1974: 46).

A major economic impact of agrarian reform was the integration of peasants into a market system with capitalist relations (Mendelberg, 1985). By the 1970s this process had led to heightened peasant differentiation. Many peasants, especially in the areas around Cochabamba and La Paz became semi-proletarianized as increasing numbers sold their labor in urban centers to supplement income from agriculture (Mendelberg, 1985). The variation in the impact of the Reform across the country was due to the fact that pre-Revolution land tenure patterns differed considerably within and between the regions (Assies, 2006). Similarly, the trajectory of peasant union formation in the revolution's aftermath was far from uniform. Following agrarian reform, peasant unionism broadly followed three regional models (Ticona, Rojas, and Albó, 1995: 36-37). In the highlands where traditional forms of organization were strong and haciendas weaker, peasant unions were accommodated by existing organizations; in effect, the union was, in most cases, a mere re-naming of existing community organization structures (Yashar, 2005: 161). In the valleys in Cochabamba and other productive agricultural areas such as around Lake Titicaca, the prevalence of haciendas meant traditional forms of Indigenous organization had been largely displaced. In these areas, in the absence of Indigenous authorities or structures, ex-hacienda workers took more enthusiastically to the formation of new peasant unions as an organizational instrument that helped in the expulsion of landowners and the recovery of usurped land (Ticona, Rojas, and Albó, 1995: 103). Thirdly, in Northern Potosí, a more conflictual relationship emerged between peasant unions and traditional ayllu organizations. In this region, the ayllus successfully resisted the widespread penetration of state-sponsored unions (Ticona, Rojas and Albó, 1995: 36-37).

Agrarian reform must be understood in the context of revolutionary state-building and as a modernization project. While early scholars of agrarian reform, such as Richard Patch (1961), frame it as a popular process in which the peasantry played an active role, revisionist scholars pointed to its top-down nature and co-optive implications (see Rivera, 1987; Ticona, 1995). Agrarian reform enabled the MNR revolutionary state to install itself within peripheral rural areas through its control over official peasant unions, which ended up impeding the development of autonomous peasant organizations. In a dynamic

of incorporation and co-optation, these unions were intended to replace traditional modes of Indigenous organizations such as ayllus, or communities. In areas where unions had existed prior, the dynamics of the post-revolutionary regime changed their structure and purpose and turned them into interlocutors between peasant and state via a rural bureaucracy loyal to the MNR leadership (Kohl, 1982: 610; Yashar, 2005:159). State-appointed *dirigentes* (managers) controlled the votes of local sindicatos, and ultimately shored up the peasantry as a reliable constituency of the MNR. Peasants were thus freed from domination by *hacendados (landowners)* but found themselves controlled by unions as the intermediaries of the post-revolutionary state. In this way, agrarian reform, according to Hurtado (1986: 222), for more than twenty years served as the most important instrument of state domination.

There was also a racial logic driving the state's drive to transform rural space and modernize Indigenous peoples. Reformist elites in pre-revolutionary Bolivia found a persuasive explanation for Bolivia's deep racial divisions and political fragmentation in the natural world. Expanding the reach of the state into the countryside was a way of civilizing both the landscape and the Indian populations who lived in it, thereby addressing the widely perceived problem of Indian "backwardness." Accordingly, the term peasant (campesino) was officially adopted by the architects of the 1952 revolution as part of a homogenizing *mestizaje* vision of Bolivian society which sought to expunge the nation's Indian elements (Rivera, 1987). The terms *indígena* (Indigenous) and *indio* (Indian) were deemed feudal and pejorative, and so were replaced in state and popular discourse with the ostensibly modern, race-blind label "peasant" (*campesino)* in a process of *campesinización (campasinoization)*. An article published under the alias 'Huascar' on 26 July 1953 in the national newspaper *La Nación* (1953: np) declared that "agrarian reform is the policy of liquidating the Indigenous as Indigenous." Agrarian reform would "destroy and eliminate forever the condition of misery, hunger and the condition of a colonial country" (*La Nación*, 1953: np). The article went on to claim that it would boost productivity in the countryside, "elevating [the Indigenous] to the category of producer and consumer citizen" *(La Nación*, 1953: np) Agrarian reform was thus part of a racial project which aimed to establish a system of agrarian capitalism and transform Indians into rural proletarians within it (Hurtado, 1986).

Although the Indian communities of the highlands benefited from the redistribution of land, the devaluation of *ayllus* and the privileging of individual landownership (which eventually led to excessive smallholding) were perceived to be culturally and economically damaging by peasants. Publications and recordings from CSUTCB general meetings in the 1980s show that agrarian reform continued as a problem for the peasantry, and indeed to this day due to its unequal application (Assies, 2006). Its 1983 Political and Syndical Thesis states that agrarian reform "culminated a long process of fragmentation of our communitarian organizational forms ….. our oppressors have advocated by various means a systematic dispossession of our historical identity. They tried to make us forget our true origins and reduce ourselves only to peasants without personality, without history and without identity." (CSUTCB, 1983 in Toranzo, 1987: 226).

Several speakers at the Third Congress of Peasant Unity in 1987 also raised agrarian reform in the historical context of peasant exploitation. An unnamed speaker criticized agrarian reform as both an attack against the livelihoods and value system of peasants. "Agrarian reform legalized dispossession, abuse, and discrimination, created more individualized agrarian labor, and 'minifundized' our plots." The speaker goes on to state: "On the other hand, it strengthened new large landowners of the agro-industrial and rancher type in eastern Bolivia, who exploit a mass of sugar cane harvesters [*zafreros*], cotton pickers, farmers, etc, and are favored with all kinds of advantages from the state. Agrarian reform has not even reached many areas."

Agrarian reform was placed in a continuum of colonial exploitation against humans and other-than-humans. The same speaker states, "Large landowners have continued to exploit Chiquitania, Guarani [lowland regions], etc. under a colonial system and methods, *plundering and destroying the ecology of the tropical plains.*" (my emphasis added), undergirding how the expansion of agrarian capitalism was perceived to be environmentally destructive. Another unidentified speaker asked, "What happened to agrarian reform? The redistribution of the land was limited, the fundamental problem of improving the living conditions of the peasant, *compañeros…* was forgotten." He continues, "It is a government in favor of big business, for the large businesses of this country and for the transnationals [...] which have plundered this country's wealth." He concludes, "The peasant problem is a national problem."

In 1964 General René Barrientos seized power in a military coup that overthrew the government of Victor Paz Estenssoro and brought the post-revolutionary government of the MNR to an abrupt end. The Barrientos regime (1964-1969) introduced the Military Peasant Pact, which bound the peasant leadership to the right-wing military government in exchange for a promise to not undo the 1953 Agrarian Reform. The government sought to prevent an alliance between workers, miners, and peasants and deployed clientelist practices to co-opt the peasantry and suppress struggles from organized workers and miners. State massacres of miners in 1965 and 1967 further crushed efforts to resist (Rivera, 1987: 105). In short, through the Pact the peasantry became the social base that legitimized the power and counterrevolutionary aims of the post-revolutionary state (Hurtado, 1986: 222).

In the 1960s the peasant movement was dominated by the government-sponsored union, the Confederacion Nacional de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia (Bolivian National Confederation of Peasant Workers, CNTCB). Another military coup in October 1970 brought the leftist General Juan José Torres to the presidency for less than a year. During this time, an *Asamblea Popular* (Popular Assembly) was formed from labor and peasant organizations, as well as parties from the radical left. This swiftly ended when the far-right military dictator Colonel Hugo Banzer Suarez (1971-1978) seized power in yet another coup in 1971.

By the 1970s, the Military Peasant Pact was fast breaking down following attempts by the Barrientos government to introduce a new rural property tax (Assies, 2006). This occurred at the same time as the government began to accelerate state expenditure away from the peasant agriculture of the highlands, towards the lowland areas which were dominated by large *latifundistas (estate*

owners). The share of loans invested in large lowland agriculture by the Bolivian Agricultural Bank (BAB), the state agency that administered funds to promote peasant agriculture, rose from 68 to 90 percent between 1968 and 1971 (Eckstein, 1982: 110). Exacerbating the effects of IMF-financed devaluation in 1972, Banzer introduced a decree in 1974 which meant food prices drastically increased. Thousands of Quechua-speaking peasants in the valleys joined forces with the Aymara peasantry in Aroma province in the department of La Paz to block roads in protest. Their efforts were met with violence, notoriously in the Massacre of the Valley in 1974 when state forces massacred at least 100 Quechua-speaking peasants in the Cochabamba Valley (Albó, 1987: 398).

Between 1978 and 1980 there were three elections and four military coups (Rivera, 1987: 110). An alliance between workers and peasants crystallized during the "cocaine coup" by drug trafficker-backed General Luis García Meza, on 17 July 1980. Shortly after seizing power, Meza sent troops into a COB meeting, arresting five leaders and brutally killing Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz, then leader of the Bolivian Socialist Party.

Meanwhile, efforts were underway by kataristas at the provincial level to wrest control of the peasant unions away from leaders co-opted by the state. Katarismo emerged around La Paz in the late 1960s as a political expression of Aymara ethnic consciousness combined with class-based theories of exploitation (Albo, 1991; Hurtado, 1986; Rivera, 1984). The label offers a capacious umbrella for a number of syndicalist and intellectual currents that denounced the racialized oppression of Indigenous peoples and the colonial character of the Bolivian nation-state (Macusaya, 2018). The katarista outlook was codified in a document known as the Tiwanaku Manifesto in 1973, which confronted the creole-left's neglect of culture and ethnicity in the struggle faced by Bolivia's Indigenous peoples (Hurtado, 1986: 59-60). Recent works have complicated the vision of the left as totally unreceptive to Indigenous issues in Bolivia (see Young, 2019). Kataristas within and beyond the CSUTCB confronted a class reductionist left which gave little weight to Indigenous peoples as revolutionary protagonists, nor crucially to the environment as a locus of Indigenous-peasant struggle. In contrast, the katarismo offered a radical rethinking of the past and the natural world in the formation of Bolivian society.

In 1970, katarista Aymara leaders Jenaro Flores Santos and Macabeo Chila were elected to senior positions in the peasant unions in La Paz and Oruro departments respectively (Rivera, 1987: 112). Their arrival heralded a rupture with the official status quo. In symbolic terms, they added "TK" to the end of the union name in honor of Tupac Katari (Albó, 1987: 392).

In June 1979, the *Central Obrera Boliviana*, (Bolivian Workers Central – COB) the national trade union federation, sponsored the First Congress for Peasant Unity in La Paz. The CSUTCB was founded during this Congress as the culmination of efforts by katarista peasants to build an autonomous peasant movement. From its founding, it was headed by Secretary General Jenaro Flores who came from Sicasica, La Paz, the birthplace of Tupac Katari two centuries earlier. With the COB leadership murdered, in hiding, or imprisoned following the coup by Garcia Meza between 17 July 1980 and 19 June 1981, Jenaro Flores became de facto leader of the COB, the first time that an Indigenous-peasant leader had ascended to the leadership (Rivera, 1983: 163). It cemented the link

between the CSUTCB and the broader workers' movement. In an interview conducted shortly after the coup in 1980, for example, Flores declared, "they previously tried to alienate the workers from the peasants… But now there is a close relationship between mining workers and peasants because ultimately they are also from peasant extraction." (CSUTCB, 1980: 2).

That the CSUTCB was deeply imbricated in the COB was a landmark moment for the Bolivian labor and peasant movements after the historical antagonism between workers and peasants which was reified in the Military Peasant Pact (Garcia Linera, 2014: 355). Even before the imposition of the Military Peasant pact, the relationship between workers and peasants in the labor movement was uneasy. Alvaro Garcia Linera has characterized the Bolivian labor movements as historically having two organizational forms: the labor unions grouped around the COB, the so-called "union-worker" form, and the communal unions affiliated to the CSUTCB (2010). The COB tended to privilege the industrial working class, and especially the miners as revolutionary protagonists uniquely imbued with class consciousness. Indeed, the first COB congress in 1954 provided seats for 177 "proletarian" delegates and only 50 from the peasant class for example (Young, 2017: 137). The COB remained part of the revolutionary government until 1957 (García Linera et al, 2010) and was a major actor in the coalition of forces that buttressed the MNR and its resource nationalist ideology

Crucially, it was not only political self-determination that the new peasant leaders who arose in opposition to the Military-Peasant Pact sought. The CSUTCB is distinguished from earlier peasant unions and from the labor movement more generally, for its emphasis on ethnic identity in addition to class. In the 1980s this was encouraged by the ascendancy of neoliberal modes of governance in Bolivia and Latin America, which opened up space for a politics of multiculturalism and cultural recognition of Indigenous peoples (Van Cott, 2007). Central to the CSUTCB's aims was a desire to promote Indigenous-peasant issues within and beyond the COB. It used direct action tactics, such as in November 1979 when it instigated nationwide road blockades, together with the Departmental Federation of Peasant Workers of La Paz after a military coup by Colonel Natusch (Garcia Linera, 2014: 355-356). In the period between 1979 and 1985 under the leadership of Flores, the CSUTCB made its greatest strides in developing peasant-led initiatives for rural development. It established the Corporación Agropecuaria Campesina, (Peasant Agricultural Corporation, CORACA), as its economic arm, to assist with community crop production, commercialization, and exports (Cárdenas, 1989: 225). In 1984 it presented the government with a preliminary draft of the Ley Agraria Fundamental (Fundamental Agrarian Law, LAF) which espoused Andean communitarianism and sought to strengthen Indigenous peasant self-government.

A series of booklets published by the organization Centro de Información y Documentación de Bolivia (CIDOB) in 1978 as *Los campesinos opinan* (Peasants give their opinion) convey peasant perspectives on self-organization. These booklets are not, of course, reflective of all peasants, not least because both peasants and Indigenous groups are class-divided (Brass, 2007). However, they give a helpful indication of issues being debated by the peasant movement in the 1970s. The October 1978 booklet on "Syndicalism" states "Peasant union-

ism works only when it defends the interests of its members; but, as long as the union is manipulated and controlled by the government as it is currently, it does not fulfill its true functions" (CIDOB, 1978: 13).

The booklet reflects on the connection between Indigenous forms of organization and peasant unions. "To solve our economic, social, and political problem, organization is important. But this organization must go from the smallest level, which is the family, then the community, the ayllu and even higher levels, to later acquire a provincial, departmental and national character" (1978: 13). It is clear from this statement that the peasant movement sees itself as operating within, and with, state structures. The statement also suggests that in some ways, the peasant union operates on two levels; at the local level according to local norms, and secondly, according to national protocols. 'We have spoken of ayllu, marka, etc., because our social system is still in force and continues to be organized according to a system of work, and even to its own political system. This is very important to take into account, because, if we fight for our rights, we have to start from our own values." The booklet espouses the importance of Indigenous forms of leadership in the peasant movement through a framing of democracy. "We know that there are still native authorities such as the *jilikata*. We also know that many times these jilikatas are named by a very small group; but traditionally, certain steps are necessary to assume these positions. It is in this sense that the election of these positions acquires a democratic character" (CIDOB, 1978: 13).

THE CSUTCB AND THE ENVIRONMENT

As a peasant-Indigenous hybrid union, the arguments made by the CSUTCB around the spiritual and political importance of nature reflect the emphasis on indigeneity enshrined in its founding, as well as the enmeshing of peasant and Indigenous organizational forms. CSUTCB pronouncements also reveal the "indigenization" of debates over resource nationalism which had emerged earlier in the twentieth century (Young, 2017). Historian Ben Dangl (2019: 59) has argued that CSUTCB organizational efforts were marked by the centrality of historical consciousness. This historical consciousness had a deeply ecological dimension. I use ecology here to refer broadly to ideas about natural space, landscape and the other-than-human, and the use and ownership of natural resources. The prevalence of *wiphalas* (flags representing Andean Indigenous peoples), Indigenous dress, and ecology in CSUTCB discourse and iconography articulated the centrality of indigeneity in CSUTCB discourse. At the local level, one of the functions of elected, rotating Indigenous authorities such as the jilikata is to be an intermediary between humans and other-than-human entities such as sacred mountains for example (Stroebele-Gregor, 1996). In this sense, a political model derived from Indigenous modes of organizing may well involve a vision that includes the other-than-human. The CSUTCB's formation of what Susan Healey calls an "ethno-ecological identity," reflects how the environment was reframed as an area of ethnic, as well as agrarian concern (2009). Employing an ecological discourse rooted in appeals to indigeneity also helped the CSUTCB imbue demands for state assistance in a language amena-

ble to NGOs and other potential non-governmental allies, which played a critical role in rural development projects in the 1980s and 90s (Freiherr von Freyberg, 2011).

Examining how and why the CSUTCB articulated a discourse on the natural world is crucial in understanding the importance of the environment for the peasant-Indigenous movement in Bolivia more widely. The CSUTCB's position on the environment points to the coalescence of environmental and Indigenous politics within the organized peasant movement in Bolivia in the late twentieth century. As has been widely documented, the CSUTCB's focus on ethnicity in the 1980s arose out of the katarista movement and the longer history of Aymara political mobilization on the altiplano (Rivera, 1987). This emphasis on ethnic identity became especially pronounced in the 1980s. At the Third Congress of Peasant Unity in 1987, taped interviews were conducted prior to the main meetings apparently for broadcasting on radio programs. Javier Condoreno, the Executive Secretary of the Single Departmental Federation of Peasant Workers Tupac Katari of La Paz states, "We have to become aware today more than ever, *compañeros*, of our own cultural identity as a people, as a nation, as a culture." He added, "[This Congress] marks a new historical milestone where nationalities, or oppressed nations, can consider a political thesis …and come together in this Third National Congress."

Although it claimed to represent all Indigenous nations of Bolivia, the CSUTCB was dominated by Aymara-speaking peasants of the altiplano with lowland Indigenous groups having an especially negligible presence. This was despite the sustained focus on uniting all Indigenous peoples of Bolivia by emphasizing the common experience of colonization. "The Aymara, Quechua, Cambas, Chapacos, Chiquitanos, Canichanas, Itonamas, Cayubabas, Ayoréodes, Guaranis, etc, peasants are the rightful owners of this land. We are the seed from where Bolivia was born but, even today, they treat us as exiles [*desterrados*] in our own land" (Toranzo: 225). It is interesting to note the CSUTCB's use of "*desterrados*," rather than "*exiliados*," to convey exile. *Desterrar* has roots in the Latin for land (terra), and therefore conveys a more visceral sense of being separated from earth and land, rather than from the formal boundaries of the state.

Ethnographic accounts of rituals practiced by Quechua-speaking peasants stress the relations of reciprocity and mutual dependence between peasants and their physical environment. Ethnomusicologist Henry Stobart describes how peasants in Macha, Northern Potosí believe that their crops are sentient and will "weep" (*waqay* in Quechua) if not cared for properly (2006: 27). Meanwhile John McNeish (2002) observes how the physical environment acts as a repository of history for the highland Aymara community of Santuario de Quillacas, Oruro. Mountains, hills, and even the weather and seasons were understood to be intimately connected with local people's daily lives and to provide a tangible connection with ancestors. Agricultural rituals tied to the environment are integral to Aymara spirituality. Forecasting weather, planting, and harvests reply on observations of stars, planets, flora, and fauna as well as through interpreting dreams, reading coca leaves, and relations with *achachilas* (mountain spirits) and Pachamama (Yampara, 1992: 160).

This belief in deep human-agricultural and natural environment interconnections is reflected in the political demands and criticism made by the CSUTCB in the 1980s. A proposal from a more militant *katarista* group, the Red Offensive of Tupakatarista Ayllus, (*Ofensiva Roja de Ayllus Tupakataristas* — ORAT) to the IV Ordinary Congress of the CSUTCB in 1988 exemplifies the belief in human-nature reciprocity as an integral part of the peasant's social world.

Their proposals include a sub-section entitled "*Pachamama o muerte*" (Pachamama or Death) in which the group proclaims, "since before Christ, we have been worshipping the hills, *Pukaras, Wak'as*, stones, *apachitas*, in the ceremonial and cosmic places, we are older than Western Christianity. Like our grandparents both in the time of Tiwanakinses [pre-Inca Tiwakanu civilization] and the Incas, they made sacrifices with gold and silver, with colored wool, coca, etc, every year to our Tata Inti (Sun), moon, stars, and the Pachamama, which endure from generation to generation until this day" (CSUTCB, 1989b: 31). It continues, "For this reason, in our communities we live in "*machas*" [a communal unit comprising several ayllus], our crops no longer produce well, animals die, it no longer rains, and day by day we receive the punishments of our mother nature with hail, frost and drought, and fertile Pachamama becomes sterile, she no longer provides product to us as she did before to the native children" (CSUTCB, 1989b: 31).

The article goes on to imbue acts of agrarian labor with cosmological importance:

> "Another of the most important points that we must touch is to plow the earth with a cosmic consciousness, and to produce more and more, to accumulate and save that production in the *Pirwas* [storage barns], because for us, the discriminated and exploited, the most difficult days are coming, that is to say, we are on the eve of the *awqa-pacha* or the *pachakuti*, that is what the birds, the stones, the rivers, the hills, the rains, and the lightning announce to us." It continues by connecting transcendent social change with a politics of landscape: "It is a necessity and an urgency that there must be the return of the last Inca tupak katari for a telluric transformation to our ancestral homeland."

Pachakuti is a well-documented concept in literature on Andean cosmovisions. *Pacha* refers to earth, time, and space, and *kuti* refers to time or reversal but the concept can acquire different meanings and is often used to refer to a shift in time, revolution, or profound upheaval in the cosmos (Rivera, 1991).

At the CSUTCB general meeting in Potosí in July 1988, an unnamed speaker urged his compañeros to defend their lands, stating "We, as natives of these lands of Kollasuyo, have been usurped by people who came to these lands. We are the ones who were born in these lands and these *k'aras* [foreigners] do not truly reflect this position. And those who came from another place, with another form of reflection, another way of life, impose their ways and customs." He goes on to make the following remarks: "There are two well-defined interests; capitalism, although we should say colonialism. And feudalism — to exploit our riches, our lands, our Pachamama" (CSUTCB, 1988a). He then says, "We have seen with our eyes them taking away the gold, silver, everything that exists in this country. This Andean country Bolivia, which was formerly Kollasuyo, was a rich country, as well as its inhabitants… [and now] we are beggars" (CSUTCB, 1988a).

By 1985 CSUTCB unity was greatly weakened by a series of internecine struggles over political allegiances, as the frequently combative meetings from around this time attest. At the Third National Congress in 1985, the katarista faction headed by Jenaro Flores clashed with the *Movimiento Campesino de Base* (MCB) headed by Victor Morales which was more closely aligned to the traditional left and the COB (Albó, 1991: 60). At the 1987 Third Congress on Peasant Unity in the city of Cochabamba in 1987, a militant named Victor Mercado stated optimistically, "We believe that this Congress is going to come up with important solutions to lead the way, to seek the definitive liberation of our country. We consider this congress to be important since we are at a difficult political moment" (CSUTCB, 1987).

As is evident from the appeals of an unnamed speaker at the CSUTCB General Meeting in 1988, landscape could serve as a lyrical metaphor of unity between the disparate Indigenous nations of Bolivia, cementing their common class position as peasants—"We are aymaras, quechuas, amazónicos, guarani, we are from Bolivia, *we are the air, water, we are the land . . . the pampas*" (my emphasis added). He continues, "We are the communitarian civilisation, we aymaras, quechuas, amazónicos, guarani. We are *campesinos*." (CSUTCB, 1988a). It also underscores how grassroots members of the CSUTCB perceived a close connection between peasant-Indigenous identities and the natural world. From its founding, the CSUTCB was anxious to downplay the class stratification within the ranks of its membership by highlighting the overarching enemy of capitalism for both landless laborers and land-owning peasants. The CSUTCB's 1983 Political Thesis states defensively, "We are far from petty bourgeois because we own plots of land. The land is for us primarily a condition of production and an inheritance from our ancestors, rather than a means of production." Land is conceptualized as a spatial and historical entity, rather than purely as an economic resource.

The report of the outgoing Executive Committee to the IV Ordinary National Congress of the CSUTCB 1988-1989 contains a section on "*Tierra - territorio - libertad y poder.*" (Land, territory- freedom, and power) in which the CSUTCB demands "the preservation of the environment of the natural resources of flora and fauna, of the air we breathe, of the forests and jungle because without them we cannot live" (1989b: 29). The Committee expressed the need to fight for communitarian land ownership rather than individual. The October 1978 issue of *Los campesinos opinan*, which focused on the "Economic Situation of the Peasantry," reveal that extracting concessions from the state - in this case, an irrigation system - was a priority for the peasantry. It states, "Climatological factors are the main problems of natural origin. In many places, especially in the highlands, it rains little, and water is scarce. Hence the need for a good irrigation system; but unfortunately the state does not care about solving this problem" (CIDOB, 1978: 6).

At least as early as 1978 climate change was articulated by peasants as a major ecological threat. They attributed it to atomic bomb testing by the United States. Ecological degradation was thus, for peasants, tied up with US neo-imperialism. "Apart from the lack of water, [the land] suffers a lot from frost and hail that destroy the crops. These phenomena are a consequence of North American technology (atomic bomb, capsule launch), which has caused

changes in the climate, intensifying the bad weather" (1978: 6). An additional ecological problem is related to pests: "There are also phytopathological factors, that is to say, fungal pests, insects, against which we are prepared to fight" (1978:6).

Throughout the 1980s, the CSUTCB sought help from the national government to address environmental problems that produced hardships for peasants. A severe drought devastated the altiplano in 1984 which compounded a deep economic crisis. Half a million people were forced to migrate from the highlands to urban areas and to the lowlands seeking alternative sources of income, often in illicit coca production (Do Alto, 2007; McNeish, 2002). In the 1987 meeting, one speaker from the Commission on Natural Disasters declared, "Our fellow farmers believe that foreign countries should contribute to our common cause to help overcome our problems of natural disasters. However, those of us who suffer, especially in rural areas, do not receive any kind of help because of the nation's institutions and the central government" (CSUTCB, 1987). The Commission on Natural Disasters also emphasized the need for the union to operate at the national level to coordinate efforts from within the movement to alleviate the effects of natural disasters. "Peasants suffer firsthand such as Aymara, Quechuas, Chipayas, Guarani, and other nationalities of the country… We have an obligation to create an organization for the defense of our communities, provinces, and departments at the national level to strengthen national peasant solidarity exclusively for natural disasters" (CSUTCB, 1987).

CONCLUSION

This article has argued that the CSUTCB understood the importance of ecology, environmental disasters, and climate change in the late twentieth century. This was not solely because land and ecology represent the means of production for peasants. A reading of CSUTCB discourse shows that the environment was centered as a site of cultural and epistemological significance within anticolonial struggle. In contrast with the earlier focus on resource nationalism by the COB, the state, and assorted left actors in mid-twentieth century Bolivia, I show that a more complex vision of natural resources emerged in the CSUTCB by the 1980s with regard to the environment. These heralded a new way of articulating an Indigenous vision of natural resources within the framework of organized labor. Embedded within the CSUTCB's critiques of US imperialism and internal colonization was a recognition that ecological destruction was connected with modes of domination, both epistemological and material. Advocating for greater concern for planetary wellbeing thus reflected an Indigenous-centered critique of Euro-modernity developed by the CSUTCB, and suggests the natural world became a nexus of peasant-Indigenous political identities in the 1980s. It is argued here that the renewed focus on ethnicity as an axis of oppression from the 1970s onwards opened up avenues for a discourse on the environment which departed from earlier discourses on resource nationalism. Ecological arguments corresponded to Indigenous cosmovisions, but they also provided a means for advancing anti-capitalist critiques through

the language of culture which was more amenable to postmodern turn during the neoliberal era (Brass, 2007; 2005). The findings of this article are therefore important for two key reasons. Firstly, they show that the focus on ethnicity from the 1970s onwards opened avenues for a discourse on the environment that departed from earlier debates around resource nationalism. Secondly, this focus on the environment, taking form in "communal" unions which formed part of the CSUTCB, came to fruition firmly under the parameters of organized labor. With regard to the latter observation, this article seeks to add to the literature on the relationship between peasant unionism and environmentalism in late twentieth-century Bolivia.

NOTE

1. The CIDOB referred to here should not be confused with the Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente Boliviano (Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of the Bolivian East, also abbreviated to CIDOB) which was founded in 1982. The Centro de Información y Documentación de Bolivia (Bolivian Information and Documentation Centre), which published many of the documents referred to in this paper, was founded in the 1970s in La Paz. It operated until approximately 1980 when it ceased operations after being targeted after the Garcia Meza coup. Many of the CSUTCB's reports in the 1980s were published by the Centro de Documentación e Información - Bolivia (Documentation and Information Centre - Bolivia) (CEDOIN), which absorbed much of CIDOB's functions. The Centro de Información y Documentación de Bolivia (Bolivian Information and Documentation Centre) CEDIB, founded in the 1970s in Cochabamba, also published many of the documents referred to in this paper. I would like to thank Ann Chaplin for providing helpful clarification on this point.

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